

Welsh Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

please reply to:
61 Chantal Avenue
Penyfai
Bridgend
CF31 4NW

For the attention of

rowland.pittard@railfuturewales.org.uk

23rd August 2016

Re: Wales and Borders Rail Franchise Inquiry

Dear Sir,

Railfuture is a national independent voluntary organisation campaigning for a bigger, better railway in Wales, so we welcome the opportunity to provide an informed response to the questions in this consultation.

Railfuture recognises the importance of providing improved rail services that offer more journey opportunities to a wider range of travellers, as a contribution to the wider issues of economic, employment and skills, social inclusion and the environment. There is an opportunity to learn from the best practice in Wales and also across England and Scotland from the wider Railfuture organisation.

Our response is below. If you require any more detail, or clarification, please do not hesitate to get in touch. We would also refer you to our Welsh Development Plan which is available on the internet at <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/DL702>.

Yours faithfully,

Rowland Pittard

Rowland Pittard
Secretary
Railfuture Cymru
Railfuture TOC Liaison - Arriva Trains Wales

www.railfuture.org.uk www.railfuturescotland.org.uk www.railfuturewales.org.uk
www.railwatch.org.uk

Wales and Borders Rail Franchise Inquiry

Welsh Affairs Committee

What standard of performance has been experienced under the current franchise?

For most of the franchise term the reliability and timekeeping performance has been above average with ATW being in the top 5 performing companies. This high level of performance has been marred recently with train cancellations because of a driver dispute.

The franchise has an older stock than most other franchises and it is to the credit of ATW that they have even increased the performance of the elderly stock available and constructed a new depot at Machynlleth to further improve performance of the class 158 units

The no growth franchise has limited improvements but Welsh but we believe that since the franchise was let in 2003 the Welsh Government has acquired 3 additional class 158, 25 additional class 150 units and two locomotive hauled sets in an attempt to reduce overcrowding and provide additional services to Ebbw Vale, the Vale of Glamorgan line, Fishguard Harbour and Merthyr, however overcrowding is now common on many services in particular concerning commuter services in South Wales, in the Summer Holiday season in North Wales and on Event Days at Cardiff.

Very few stations in Wales have staff but a high quality of poster information is provided at the stations. All stations have CIS screens which could be put to better use at times of disruption. Where present, station staff are helpful to passengers and both station staff and on train staff assist disabled passengers. The on train buffet trolley system and cwtch cafes are appreciated where they are provided. ATW has encouraged volunteer station adopters who have helped to improve the ambience of many stations. The provision of internet facilities should be expanded to all stations in the Wales and Borders network.

Trains are prepared for entry into service in a clean condition with well stocked toilets and are periodically cleaned en route by on train cleaners. Short turn rounds prevent satisfactory cleaning in some cases.

What lessons have been learnt from the current franchise?

The provision of a not for growth franchise was inappropriate and has held back rail transport developments in Wales.

There was inadequate funding from UK Government and Welsh Government has had to use its own resources to provide additional stock and improve stock and stations. There has been a reluctance of train owning companies to invest in the stock of the present franchise and as a result Welsh Government has made investments in class 158 units for use on the Cambrian lines and in locomotive hauled stock. No new stock has been purchased for the franchise.

European funding has helped station and other improvements but at present it is unclear whether similar levels of funding from UK Government rather from the EU will be available in future.

A long franchise has provided stability but by its nature has restricted any major improvements.

What improvements should passengers expect under the next franchise?

Railfuture has spelt these out in detail in its Development Plan for the Railways of Wales.

The plan covers in detail service levels, rolling stock, stations, infrastructure and communications for all lines in Wales and the Borders.

There is a need for all rolling stock, irrespective of age, to be provided with free wifi facilities. New stock should include a variation appropriate to attract tourists to the scenic routes of Wales. Stations should also provide free wifi to supplement train service, end to end journey information and local information.

Links for downloading copies of the Railfuture Cymru/Wales Rail Development Plan 3rd Edition 2013 are:

<http://www.railfuture.org.uk/DL702> - 2-wide with maps

<http://www.railfuture.org.uk/DL699> - 1-wide without maps

The link to a summary of the plan is <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/DL1368>

There should be a turn up and go service in North East Wales with links to Liverpool and Manchester and South Wales in an area bounded by Abergavenny, Chepstow and Swansea with links to Bristol

How do Welsh and UK Governments cooperate in deciding how passenger services be run?

This is difficult to answer when one does not see behind the scenes.

We are concerned that integrated public transport has not been achieved because of competition laws.

There has not been a clear and complete devolution of transport powers to Welsh Government. There has been recent concern with UK Government about present Wales and Borders franchise services which operate in England. Railfuture supports the retention of existing services in the franchise and considers that there should be an expansion of services including new electric services between Swansea and Bristol to unite the Severnside conurbation and between North Wales and Liverpool via the Halton Curve providing for significant flows for both work and leisure. The Wrexham-Bidston service should be electrified and become part of the Merseyrail network.

Railfuture is also concerned that there is a reluctance by UK authorities to develop cross border services. For example, from North Wales to Manchester Airport a daily hourly service has only partially been achieved, an Aberystwyth to Marylebone service was refused and there are proposals to alter/divert services in the Midlands from New Street to Snow Hill. The South Wales to Waterloo service was discontinued.

The UK Government has not made any proposals how HS2 could be of benefit to Wales and has not made any commitment to Welsh Government for a payment, as per the Barnett formula, to compensate for there being no HS2 developments in Wales.

The Welsh Government does not have any authority over other rail operators, other than ATW, in Wales and this must be corrected if the railways of Wales are to develop to their highest potential. The Wales and Borders franchise which was taken over by ATW was developed with a Standard Pattern Timetable with fixed interval services. There have been minor changes to the Standard Pattern Timetable provided for local needs and to provide service enhancements including some at the request of Welsh Government.

The initial time table provided for an half hourly service between Newport and Swansea with one FGW and one ATW service per hour giving an half hourly service between the major cities of Wales. Subsequently FGW (now GWR) altered their timetable without consultation to provide for their hourly trains to Swansea leaving 15 minutes earlier from Paddington and running within 10 minutes of the ATW service from Newport thus destroying the half hourly service and also removing many onward connections which had been set up in conjunction with the FGW service. This unsatisfactory situation remains today. There must be an understanding between UK Government/ DfT and Welsh Government that this cannot happen in the future.

FGW have also removed several services in South Wales including the 1715 service from Cardiff to Swansea which was well used by commuters and has since resulted in overcrowding in peak hour services from Cardiff westwards. A Saturday morning service from Swansea to Paddington which provided excellent connections for passengers from West Wales and a return Saturday evening service have also been removed, again without consultation. During the period of the Severn Tunnel closure in September/ October 2016 GWR have removed 75% of their weekday services in South Wales. It appears that Welsh Government has no powers to prevent this deterioration of services and provide a true integrated service.

Railfuture is also concerned that DfT has directed GWR to use inappropriate cascaded ex-London suburban rolling stock on the Cardiff to Portsmouth service which will be inferior to stock at present in use. This stock is being moved to the West Country which will be a loss to Wales.

The high cost of fares on direct services from Wales to London by operators such as Virgin and GWR compared with fares within England to London should be reviewed. There have also been problems in North Wales with the timing of Virgin West Coast services but these have mainly been resolved, however Wrexham lost its through services to London Marylebone which has only been compensated by one service provided by Virgin West Coast. It is inappropriate for passengers in Wales to pay high fares when there is no improvement in capacity or quality of rolling stock.

The funding of rail improvements in Wales also raises concern following promises from Central Government that may not be fulfilled. The first is the issue of electrification from Cardiff to Swansea and also the diversionary route via the Vale of Glamorgan which has been put back with no firm commitment. The electric depot at Swansea was completed in October 2015.

The South East Wales electrification was to have included the lines from Bridgend to Maesteg and Cardiff/Newport to Ebbw Vale Town as well as the Vale of Glamorgan route and its branches to Penarth and Barry Island but these appear to have been withdrawn from the present plans. Services on the three routes were to be enhanced from hourly to half hourly in line with passenger expectations and demand but the promised funding for these developments appears to be on hold and a smaller proposal for Metro services is now being considered.

R L Pittard

"The Railway Development Society Limited is a (not for profit) Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales No 5011634. Registered Office:- 24 Chedworth Place, Tattingstone, Suffolk IP9 2ND"